THE PLEASURES AND PROFITS

OF

OUR LITTLE POULTRY FARM

THE PLEASURES AND PROFITS OF OUR LITTLE POULTRY FARM.

THE PLEASURES AND PROFITS

OF

OUR LITTLE POULTRY FARM

"No profit grows where is no pleasure taken."

SHAKESPEARE.

LONDON
CHAPMAN AND HALL, 193, PICCADILLY
1879

INTRODUCTION.

WE are sure no justification is required for bringing the following pages under public consideration. At the present moment, when the provision question is the most important subject of the day, any endeavour to solve the problem of food supply, by showing how to develop our national resources, by making home produce plentiful, will, we are convinced, receive serious attention from all who are interested in the prosperity of our country.

In the statement of our successes we have simply recorded our *boná-fide* experiences, and we hope we shall be the means of exciting emu-

lation and causing an extension of so interesting a pursuit as poultry-farming in England, so that the diligent may derive profit and the patriotic feel less dependent upon the domestic industry of foreign countries.

THE PLEASURES AND PROFITS

OF

OUR LITTLE POULTRY FARM.

It happens to many people at some period of their existence that they become unaccountably possessed with a desire to break through the trammels of conventionality, and, although apparently surrounded with every accessory of enjoyment, forego the amenities of what is called polite society, to seek for keener happiness under more humble conditions—to descend, as it were, from the cold regions of the world's heights for the sake of tasting the more sterling pleasures afforded by the peaceful valleys below. We all know the charm of change is so great to most of us, that even those whom circumstances have rendered almost as inseparably attached to their domiciles as the snail is to his habitation find it occasionally desirable to migrate, if only

"from the blue bed to the brown," while the more free and enterprising sigh for those "fresh woods and pastures new" which temptingly lie open to the conquest of all who have health, energy, and liberty to set forth and enjoy them. Some years ago, without our having to our knowledge any taint of Bohemianism about us, we grew restless, the restrictions of London life chafed our spirit, and we began to indulge in a day-dream of not only taking our usual summer flitting to the country, but of leaving the busy turmoil of town for good, and permanently establishing ourselves in some rural spot where the enjoyment of sacred quiet and pastoral joys would more than compensate us for losing the empty honour of being considered citizens of the world. This vague longing for emancipation soon assumed the shape of a definite intention to achieve our wishes. Our ideal was a rustic retreat of the smallest dimensions, far away from noisy neighbours, yet not altogether out of the world. But how was it possible to discover the envied little Elysium we had fixed our hearts upon? We were ambitious of *buying*, not

merely renting, a place. Most diligently we applied ourselves to studying the estate sales advertised in the London daily papers, and we likewise provided ourselves with the provincial newspapers of the localities we thought most desirable. We also consulted agents. Country quarters appeared plentiful enough in every direction, and, according to the descriptions given of them, their attractions were perfectly irresistible, and appeared to embody everything we wanted; but when we came to make inquiries or venture upon an inspection—which in many cases was an expensive exploit—the reality fell sadly short of the picture that had been presented to our view. As a last resource, we resolved to advertise for what we wanted, *i.e.* a small freehold detached cottage and a few acres of land. We received many answers to our advertisement, but in every instance the property offered was, both in size and price, very wide of our requirements. Residential estates instead of small rustic homesteads were all we could hear of, except in some cases where we ascertained to our cost that what had been

represented to our notice as *convertible* dwelling-places surrounded by rich and productive pasture land were nothing more than little cow-sheds standing upon plots of waste unenclosed common, or on the outskirts of desolate heaths or wild barren moors. It may be naturally supposed that as the chances of our success diminished the avidity we felt for obtaining our quest increased. The illusion grew brighter as it was vanishing away, just as our hopes, like bruised herbs, send forth all their sweetness when being crushed. Disappointment seemed inevitable. The Saint Graal could not have appeared more mythical than the tiny hermitage we sought. It was really very provoking of the public to misconstrue the meaning of our advertisement, when, candidly to own the truth, we flattered ourselves it was a masterpiece of conciseness and comprehensiveness. It stood thus: "Wanted, with immediate possession, a small detached rustic cottage, with two or three acres of freehold land, within fifty miles of London." Although we had expressly placed a limit to the distance from town, we received replies from

persons in Cornwall, the North Riding of Yorkshire, Suffolk, Cardiganshire, Lincolnshire, Herefordshire, Jersey, and several other parts equally beyond the bounds we had given. In many cases, through misrepresentations, we were lured far away to look at estates in no respect answering the particulars afforded. But, notwithstanding we were in this manner made to suffer by being put to the expense of fruitless journeys to inspect totally unsuitable properties, we were much amused at the very questionable recommendations put forth to attract a purchaser. One enterprising proprietor advocated the merits of a tiny field of three-quarters of an acre on account of the imaginary capabilities of an almost imperceptible rivulet of water which he fondly dreamt would, with due encouragement, ultimately supply motive power for machinery, and prove invaluable for manufacturing purposes! Unfortunately, however, as we entertain almost a morbid dislike to machinery, we failed to appreciate the assumed advantage offered to us. Another correspondent, having a place to dispose of, vaunted the attractions of a

wide expanse of uncultivated common on the ground of its being admirably adapted for military manœuvres. Now, as we were not at all ambitious of perpetuating the Battle of Dorking on a small scale or indulging in sham fights, we showed ourselves ruthlessly indifferent to the potential glory of taking up a position considered so well suited to the display of warlike tactics. Upon neither of the foregoing spots was there anything of a dwelling-place. The next thing suggested to our notice was a so-called delightfully situated retreat, described by a West-end agent of renown in the most glowing colours; and it turned out to be a weird tract of uncleared land, a perfect jungle of gigantic gorse, and constituting part of Bagshot Heath. Standing upon it was a hut of two compartments, one of which was in the quiet occupation of three donkeys. Another abode was enthusiastically spoken of from its convenient proximity to the Necropolis at Woking; while "a most desirable *genteel* villa residence," without even a garden, was honourably mentioned as being next door to a well-frequented roadside

inn! In the eyes of those having land upon their hands the near neighbourhood of brick-fields seemed to form a most extraordinary allurement; and as for mere building sites put forward by speculators their name was legion, and the prices asked were enormous. Though we had so distinctly stated that we sought for something that was freehold, most of the places offered to us were either only leasehold, copy-hold, or in some way encumbered. Almost invariably there were habitations without land attached, or land without any habitation on it. As a rule, however, the majority of the estates for disposal proved too large and too costly for our modest views and means. In our search for an estate we were much struck by the fact that though all owners wishing to find purchasers were so singularly impressed with the inexhaustible advantages likely to be derived from their several properties, yet strangely enough they had never themselves thought fit to develop the resources they so confidently proclaimed.

Summer was quickly passing, and we were upon the point of giving up our pursuit, when some

friends in the north of Hampshire unexpectedly forwarded us the particulars of a small freehold cottage, field, and garden, which would be shortly for sale by auction. It was said to be situated in a highly respectable and pleasant neighbourhood, the dwelling-place substantially built, detached, in thorough repair, with a nice paddock, an orchard well stocked with choice fruit-trees, a large and productive kitchen garden, some venerable ornamental timber, and an inexhaustible well of water. The place was also stated to be admirably adapted for any one desirous of a hunting-lodge or shooting-box, there being in the immediate vicinity two popular packs of hounds and an abundance of game. It is needless to say the latter recommendations, not being at all in our line, were totally thrown away upon us. Still the existence of hounds and their consequent huntsmen looked like a guarantee that we should not be absolutely buried alive in such a spot, even if we were not active votaries of the chase. We therefore lost no time in requesting our friends to try and secure us the little cottage and its belongings, if the whole

could be had for a reasonable sum. Fortunately the sale was to occur before the end of harvest-time, when it always happens that money is scarce with small capitalists in agricultural districts. Owing to this happy chance there was scarcely any competition at the sale, and the property was knocked down to us for the moderate sum of two hundred guineas! We had not previously even seen it! Yet for all that the fee-simple was actually ours! So that with his Royal Highness the Prince Consort, when Osborne House was purchased, we could heartily exclaim, "It is so nice to have a place of our own which we can do as we like with!" An author of distinction has said that there is nothing more elevating to the mind than to possess, if it be but a small plot of freehold land, and we readily admitted the truth of this assertion when experiencing the full feeling of satisfaction in signing and sealing the documents confirming us in the "quiet enjoyment" of our long-coveted place in the country. Our envied haven was found at last; but September was near its end before we could enter upon posses-

sion. The whole concern more than corresponded with the expectations we had formed of it; nevertheless, as it had been remaining some time unoccupied, there was much to be done both indoors and out. The dwelling-place was in the fullest sense of the word a cottage, the *beau ideal* of that humble thatched cot celebrated in the ballad of "Home, sweet home." Although it was said to be in complete repair, we ascertained the roof required to be made weather-tight, the rooms needed to be papered and painted, the ceilings had to be whitewashed, and sundry dilapidated sheds condemned and removed. Our well, too, wanted a new winch and lid, and the garden gates, palings, and fences to be rehabilitated. For the performance of these improvements, and making a wide gravel path nearly a hundred feet long, we paid in all forty pounds, the cost of conveyancing included. What a labour of love it was to set it all to rights! The house contained four principal rooms, besides kitchens, dairy, washhouse, and smaller apartments. It was entered by a most picturesque pointed porch, together

with a front passage that we dignified with the name of hall, as it was capable of containing two chairs. An antique pump added interest even to the scullery on account of an imposing metal tablet assigning its date to be Anno Domini 1625. There was likewise a very spacious brick-built oven, in which we at first baked our own bread, but found before long that it was a peck of trouble. The house stood in the midst of a green meadow, and was about a hundred feet back from the high road. It was comfortably apart from any other habitation, and was environed with large trees—our *own* poplars, sycamore, oak, larch, and chestnut—which had been included in the price of the purchase money. There was nothing sordid in the aspect of the dwelling-place or its *entourage.* Roses, ivy, honeysuckle, eglantine, and vine twined together round the porch, ascended the walls of the cottage, and partly covered some of the lattice windows. On account of the adjacent forests the locality constitutes part of what is known as the woodlands of Hampshire; but please do not imagine it resembles the "bush."

We were situated midway between Basingstoke and Newbury, just in the very heart of the flowery region so loved by Canon Kingsley. The place itself was not without its traditions. Once it had belonged to that rather too liberal-minded man, Jeremy Bentham. We could not help recalling his axiom that "utility was the measure and test of all virtue;" and had it been possible for him to have divined how, in taking possession of his old property, we had voluntarily subscribed to his principle, he would have rejoiced in his grave, only that he does not happen to have one, for he aspired even to *post mortem* usefulness and was never buried, but, in accordance with his will, was embalmed, and is now above ground in Gower Street, London.

Richardson the novelist had likewise been at one time the owner of our little rustic abode. Within almost a stone's throw of our meadow gate there was a large and delightful old mansion, in one of whose wainscoted rooms "Pamela" was written. Strange that perhaps in these days we have to thank Richardson for there being any opera still in existence; for in the last cen-

tury, just as dramatic music was dying out in Europe, Piccini the composer took the story of the then popular novel "Pamela," set the libretto to music, and, under the name of *La Buona Figliuola*, its attractions were so great that it caused a sudden revival in favour of stage music, and a new operatic era was established. Besides enjoying the privilege of rambling in the classic grounds of one "who moved the passions at the command of virtue," as Dr. Johnson said of Samuel Richardson—we could walk amongst most of the scenes described by Miss Mitford, and take specimens of still life to supply studies for the pencil of Hunt the artist, affectionately styled "his little Willie" by Professor Ruskin. The old Roman road ran through our parish; the old city of Silchester, Donnington the abode of Chaucer, the dwelling-place of Pope's Belinda, and the metropolis of the West Saxon kings were within the scope of our walking powers. Amongst our first visitors, one was a descendant of the famous Lord Chief Justice Blackstone, and another whose ancestor gave us "Shall I wasting in despair," &c. So that, not-

withstanding we had assumed the part of amateur outcasts, we were not suffered to feel ourselves forsaken by society; for though it may be easy enough for any of us to say we have done with the world, it is always a very hard thing to be obliged to own the world has done with us.

Almost the only objection to our new home was that we were nearly eight miles from a railway station; however, owing to the considerate attentions of our more affluent neighbours, we were never allowed to be at a loss for means of transit when we wished to visit a market town. Before long we discovered that being at such a distance from shops was an unquestionable advantage, as it was a curb to spendthrift propensities, and in a double sense it insured our money going very far.

The situation of our cottage was so thoroughly sylvan that the lively squirrels played upon the sills of our little leaden paned casements; coveys of partridges roamed fearlessly about our garden paths; martins built under our eaves, for our roof was of thatch; swallows nested in our chimneys; woodpeckers perched in our shrubs, and

chattered the first news of coming rain; shy plovers seemed to know how much we loved the near sound of their almost human voices; nightingales cradled their young broods in the syringa bushes about the house; and even gay-plumed kingfishers flew in and out of our open windows. Our habitation was obviously ancient. It was asserted to have been the work of the *Danes;* for when the origin of anything in the neighbourhood cannot otherwise be accounted for, it is invariably attributed to the Danes, who for ages contested with the Romans for the possession of the soil in these parts, and who are even now spoken of as familiarly as though they had been occupiers of the land only yesterday. The very name of these redoubtable Danes still inspires awe; when a suspicious looking animal or herb is recommended to our notice, we are brought to place confidence in it by being assured there is no *Dane* in it. The gardens and cultivated grounds are infested with a troublesome weed, called Danewort; it is said to spring up only where Danish blood was spilt in battle, and its luxuriance is wonderful. The rustics

display much patriotic ardour in their efforts to eradicate this representative of their traditional enemy; and but for the persistent war waged against the poor unpopular plant the whole territory would soon be conquered and overrun by it.

The natives our neighbours were chiefly gipsies, basket-makers, and charcoal-burners. They were all, even the carbonari, most kindly disposed towards us. Like the rank vegetation amongst which they spend their lives, they looked strong and hardy. They rarely need more doctoring than that their own skill and mother earth supply. Certainly some of their remedies are sufficiently *recherché* to counteract the most complicated and obstinate ailments to which humanity is subject. Convulsion fits in children are kept in check by the sufferer swallowing the hot heart taken out of a live mole. For whooping-cough the treatment consists in the patient wearing on its chest a large bunch of hair plucked on the morning of Palm Sunday from the cross on the back of a male donkey. While we were proceeding to settle

ourselves in our domicile we were earnestly and affectionately entreated not to neglect to keep a horse-shoe upon our hearth for the sake of good luck; and not to fail having some house-leek placed to grow upon our roof as a spell against evil spirits and a protection against lightning. These two things we dutifully did. By way of a set-off to these evidences of intellectual darkness each villager addresses his pig in Latin, and at feeding time the welkin resounds with "Sus, sus, sus!" as in the time of the Romans.

Directly we commenced our gardening operations, we made the discovery that the *couch* in Hampshire is no lounge. This couch is a jointed grass which propagates itself subterraneously. The ground everywhere seemed to teem with it. To rid the soil of it, one has to pick out every particle of it, and after it is removed burn it, for it will not rot if it is dug in and buried. After considerable labour our garden was made effectually free from this wicked weed, and brought into tilth ready for cropping. The autumn being set in, we could not do much beyond planting plenty of broccoli and cabbages

for early spring use. We found we were stocked with numbers of gooseberry and currant bushes and raspberry canes in our kitchen garden, as well as plum, pear, and apple trees in the portion of the paddock that was considered to constitute our orchard. In the front of our rural residence there were two very large mayduke cherry-trees, and against the south wall there was a well-trained and spreading white grape-vine; this produced abundance of grapes which ripened well. We could thus not only drink of our own spring of water, but also sit under the shade of our own vine. We had not a fig-tree, inasmuch as there was really not room for one anywhere about our place.

We felled several old fruit-trees, and these afforded us a plentiful supply of fuel for the winter.

Upon becoming aware of the capabilities of our small property, we at once resolved to make it as profitable as we possibly could, just as though we were colonists in the backwoods.

Through the kindness of our neighbours, we were soon set up in quite a Corisande's garden

of flowers, having devoted some borders to showy perennials of different kinds—glorious white lilies, peonies, tulips, hollyhocks, clove-pinks, campanulas, sweet-williams, snapdragons, phlox, scarlet lychnis, dielytra, standard rose-trees, jonquils, anemones, &c., all of which blossomed bravely in their several seasons. Our fernery, too, was a wonder to all the dwellers in the district, though all the ferns were of native growth.

I must say a few words about *our* Corisande's fernery. Availing herself of the shelter afforded by the wide-spreading and drooping branches of a very large standard apple-tree, she formed round its trunk a high mound of turfy peat mould. In this she planted noble specimens of the stately Osmunda regalis, many kinds of buckler and shield ferns, broad and hard ferns, the deliciously fragrant heath fern, delicate bladder ferns, tufts of maiden-hair spleenwort, polypody, scolopendrium, &c., surrounded by a bossy bordering of black spleenwort. A sunken brick edging formed a suitable habitat for scaly hart's-tongue and rue-leaved spleenwort. In-

stead of the conventional and cockney adjunct of rockwork, the spaces of earth between the ferns were covered by a luxuriant growth of wood sorrel, shining crane's-bill, sweet woodruffe, and the beautiful ivy-leaved toad-flax, which, though now so general, was unknown in Britain until accidentally imported with the Arundel marbles.

Our cottage Corisande, inflamed with ardour by the success of our ferns and flowers, did not disdain to send dainty bouquets to market twice a week, and in her zeal could scarcely be restrained from converting the whole of our land into a flower farm. Fourpence a head for peony blossoms at Whitsuntide for church decoration certainly proved an argument in support of her suggestion.

We made strawberry and asparagus beds, dug trenches for celery, enlarged borders, narrowed paths, raised banks; in short, left nothing undone which a gardener's book or our own inventive genius could suggest. It is an universally acknowledged fact, that agricultural novices are invariably prone to overstock available space,

and I honestly confess we were at first inclined to fall into this error. When we surveyed our various plants as they began to grow, we were forcibly reminded of Goethe's Lothario, who, when Teresa showed him her garden, could not help privately opining that the things in it were set a world too close.

By the time summer came our garden—about a quarter of an acre in extent—was crammed with every imaginable variety of vegetable. Before Whitsuntide the early broccoli came in so fast and the spring cabbages hearted so rapidly, that, acting upon our intention of making everything pay, we sent many scores of them to market; and, besides this, we found ourselves constrained to buy a little pig to help consume the remainder. As soon as they were off the ground we planted autumn broccoli, and sowed late crops of peas, French beans, spinach, onions, &c. The pig we kept for a few months, and then, instead of putting it up to fatten for a bacon hog, to be killed and cured for our own eating, we sold it as a store pig at a clear profit of two pounds. This was our first successful

speculation in live-stock dealing. But for the difficulty we experienced in procuring litter for the sty we should not have disposed of piggy so soon. In subsequent years we made it a practice to "save our bacon." About the month of June, when vegetables for food are plentiful, we purchase a young porker for from twelve to fifteen shillings, and at the end of the year, when the accommodating animal has attained to the dignity of a fat hog, weighing about two hundred pounds, we have it killed and salted. From making the most rigidly correct calculations, we ascertain that on an average our meat costs us from fourpence to sixpence a pound, according to the price of the corn we have to buy. Of course all the food of home growth consumed by the pig is not charged for in the account against ourselves. But we have often killed small porkers weighing sixty pounds that have not stood us in more than threepence halfpenny a pound, each having been entirely fed with house and garden waste for a few weeks, and then had about five shillings' worth of meal to finish with.

The first year did not prove a productive

one for fruit, yet we cleared a considerable profit; for early mayduke cherries, grapes, apples, and superfluous vegetables brought us in more than enough to cover the expense of gardening implements, seeds, and all other outlay. The most saleable things were spring broccoli, summer cauliflowers, early potatoes, spinach, radishes, peas, French beans, vegetable marrows, ridge cucumbers, celery, beetroot, Brussels sprouts, and asparagus, which we subsequently cultivated. Strawberries met with a ready sale, so did raspberries, and any kind of stone fruit; but gooseberries, currants, &c., we converted into preserves and wines for home consumption. The more common kinds of vegetables, such as parsnips, turnips, carrots, green-beans, onions, rhubarb, and even lettuces, were not in demand, as they were to some extent grown in the cottagers' allotments round about the locality. We were soon convinced beyond a shadow of doubt that, with careful management, it was quite possible, even in the wilds of Hampshire, for a garden to pay the rent. In fact, the fruit and vegetables with which our own table was sup-

plied would, if purchased at market price, have cost more than the interest of the money we had paid for our cottage and land. I do not mean to say that conventionally poor people would derive an equal amount of profit from their garden produce, for the poor so called are too innately and systematically unthrifty to be capable of properly developing the resources of anything they command. Still, not to be too hard upon them, we must not lose sight of the fact that the business of their life is labour, and they cannot be brought to look upon labour as a pleasure, or even when it is to their own advantage take an interest in it as we *dilettanti* do.

The working classes, however, I am compelled to admit, are not alone in their belief that pleasure is incompatible with industrial pursuits. Many of our worldly-minded friends no sooner saw the kind of enterprise we had embarked in, than they began to rally us remorselessly upon our folly in wasting so much pains and interest in such an unworthy cause. Don Quixote's last and worst madness, they urged, was the hallucination of finding enjoyment in a rural life; and

they predicted that directly the novelty of our undertaking wore off we should cease to like it, and be but too glad to give it up. "We *must* like it! and we are *not* going to give it up!" exclaimed our courageous Corisande, with gay but decisive emphasis.

The land comprised in our small domain was under two acres. It was good sound old pasture, studded with ancient trees which gave it a park-like look. Very early in the spring it was thickly flecked with wavy snowdrops, then came daisies and daffodils, while round about the banks peeped primroses and oxlips. Later, there sprang up cowslips, sweet violets, rare orchis of many kinds, ladies' tresses, twayblades, adder's-tongue fern; and, in the hedgerows, foxgloves, Canterbury bells, blue periwinkle, and grand mullein. In the adjoining woods grew lilies of the valley and the royal osmunda, with nearly a score of other kinds of ferns; so we were in a perfect Eden of flowers and verdure.

As there was not sufficient space to pasture a cow comfortably, unless we eked out the keep furnished by our field by intervals of stall feed-

ing, we thought it advisable simply to grow a crop of grass to be made into hay for sale. With this view we shut up our meadow at the beginning of May, and by the end of June the grass was mowed. On an average we had two tons of excellent hay every year. We then let the aftermeed until Michaelmas, and for the remaining seven months we had the advantage of an extensive run for our poultry.

Two or three young heifers or yearling calves we preferred to a horse to graze down the keep in our field, as we considered cow cattle imparted a more pastoral look to our premises than other animals would do.

The fertilising substance we employed for our field was principally wood ash of our own burning, with occasionally the addition of a little chalk, and a top dressing of gypsum towards the end of May when the grass was fairly growing. Altogether, after deducting all expenses, our meadow enabled us to consider our place self-supporting. It paid our tithes, taxes, and poor-rates for us, and yielded us the interest of our purchase money into the bargain. Little

labour is required to keep the land in order. Once a year we have the hedges clipped and the fences and ditches seen to. Then in April the meadow is bush-harrowed to scarify it slightly and scatter the worm casts, &c. Somewhat later it is rolled to flatten the surface and make the operation of mowing more easy of accomplishment. Our annual haymaking is quite a great feature in our agricultural enjoyments, and our friends flock from far and near to lend a hand. Indeed, so many church dignitaries volunteer to help us, that, what with our rector, and perhaps an archdeacon and dean, with a doctor of divinity or two, our hayrick is all but a *bishopric.*

Before the middle of June abundance of elder-flowers blossom in the hedges. These we gather in dry weather, and, having a small apparatus, we generally distil a gallon of elder-flower water each summer. When any cooling application is needed for external inflammation, the fragrant result of our domestic chemistry is regarded by the surrounding villagers as a perfect charm.

Local traditions soon reminded us that we should keep bees. In the parish next to ours,

about two hundred and fifty years ago, had lived and died the celebrated Charles Butler, Fellow of Maudlin, Oxford, who first published a systematic treatise on the keeping and management of bees. His work—shown at the Caxton Exhibition—called the "Feminine Monarchie," went through several editions, and is still quoted as an authority on the subject. So attentively did old Butler study the ways of his bees, that he was enabled to note down the *tunes* they sang, and in his work gave specimens of the *part music* they performed! The reverend author must have been a very quaint kind of a divine in his way, for in the archives of the parish of which he was so long the vicar, he once made an entry of the fact that on a certain day he had received the "*extraordinary gratification* of five pounds for burying the wife of his squire." The scene of his exploits is still famous for bees. Recently a colony of old standing was discovered and removed from a dilapidated wall near the vicarage garden, and more than two bushels of bees were destroyed in getting the honey. The comb was found to measure four feet in length. It yielded one hundred

and seventy-five pounds of the most exquisite honey, and, with its proportion of beeswax, it was quite a treasure-trove to those who took it. Easy as it was for us to say we would become bee-keepers, it was difficult enough for us to carry out our intentions. The undertaking was so beset with superstitious observances, which we were called upon to respect, that it seemed next to impossible to make the acquisition we desired. Most of the proprietors of stocks of bees would no more think of disposing of any than they would be inclined to part with some of their own children. It was declared to be unlucky to the giver to make a present of bees; and if these were bought, it was imagined to be equally productive of bad fortune to the buyer and to the seller. If, however, they were to be purchased for money, *gold* only should be paid for them, and this gold should be *earned* and *honestly* earned too, for the money of the idle or unjust entailed death both upon the bees and the buyer. Again, the owners of bees would persist in asserting they did not know whether they possessed a sufficient number of hives to

spare from, as something terrible would be entailed if they were to count their stocks! Indeed, it is believed to be all but an accursed act to number one's hives—the result being that the bees would therewith take to flight. Again, to kill bees otherwise than for the legitimate purpose of taking their honey, is considered the extreme limit of human depravity; while to accidentally spill honey is held to be more ominous of evil than even to upset the salt. If Virgil and the Orientals believed bees to be "a ray of the divinity," and to owe their origin to Paradise, they are by the Hampshire rustics looked upon as links, or perhaps I should say mediums, between man and the spirit world. It is supposed a future state is enjoyed by bees, and an unshaken faith is entertained that bees are gifted with power to discriminate between good and bad people. Those folks who are given to idleness, ill-temper, thievishness, or untruthfulness need never expect the busy bees to labour for them, or even tamely to endure their presence. But bees delight in the society of the innocent, and they like to be treated as part of the family

upon whose premises they work. Should a wedding or a funeral take place, it must be formally announced to the bees; not that they are ignorant of all that is going on—this cannot be—but they are courtly and punctilious, and the polite attention is looked for. Upon a marriage taking place, the hives are decorated with white satin favours; while a death is made known by draping the hives with black crape. If these ceremonials are omitted, the industrious insects would undoubtedly perish. A kind of incantation is uttered upon the demise of a bee proprietor. A gentle knock is repeated thrice upon their hives, and then the bees are made acquainted with their loss in these terms:—

> "Little brownies, little brownies, awake, awake—
> Your master is no more.
> But stay with us, and of you we'll take
> As much care as before!"

It being evident we could not get our bees for money, we discovered we might procure them by means of barter in the swarming time, when, if we provided our own beehives, we could have swarms in exchange for anything of the esti-

mated value of a pound for each first swarm. In this way we became possessed of three strong stocks of bees, and as we had nothing more appropriate to offer for them than the sweet produce of our field, we made over an equivalent of hay in return for the envied apiary we had succeeded in establishing. Had we failed in furnishing ourselves with bees by this method, we might have been so fortunate as to *find* a swarm, either upon our own or our neighbours' land; for, according to old custom, the first discoverer of a stray swarm of bees anywhere can lay claim to it, unless it can be proved to have a rightful owner, who, however, cannot insist upon its belonging to him unless he have attached a mark of ownership near it. We began our bee-keeping by first purchasing six new beehives, which we caused to be white-washed outside to keep them healthful and cool for their occupants; six rough, strong, three-legged stools, called stalls, to stand the hives upon. These cost eightpence each, and the hives a shilling each—ten shillings in all. Within a fortnight after having the original

stocks they swarmed. These second swarms, which are called *casts*, filled the three reserve hives. Towards the end of August we took the honey from the casts, for second swarms are rarely sufficiently stored with food to stand through the winter without giving the bees artificial support. We obtained from them more than thirty pounds of beautifully clear honey, the greater part of which we reserved for the household, and contented ourselves with selling enough to defray expenses: twelve pounds at tenpence a pound paid for hives and stalls. The following year our little workers prospered so capitally that from all the original stocks we had swarms, casts, and what are termed *smarts*, *i.e.* third swarms. These last and the casts supplied us with nearly a hundredweight of fine honey. By the sale of this we were not only reimbursed for the extra hives, &c., we required, and for the value of the hay our bees had cost us, but we had a gratifying balance to boot. Sometimes we made use of small super-hives adjusted to the tops of the others, and these, when lifted at the end of a week or ten days,

were filled with exquisite honeycomb worth eighteenpence a pound. In consequence of most of our humble neighbours speculating in bees, we restrict our permanent stock to six hives. You see we fearlessly *count* ours. According to one of the wise laws of Solon, each bee-keeper was not allowed to place his hives nearer than three hundred yards to those of his neighbour. Unfortunately, this arrangement has never been heard of in Hampshire, and though there is more food than enough for colonies of bees, yet the hives are injudiciously distributed. As to the profits of bee-farming, taking good and bad years together, we can confidently reckon upon selling five pounds' worth of honey every season, exclusive of wax. That is to say, twelve swarms on an average yield ten pounds each of honey, and this disposed of at only tenpence a pound realises one hundred shillings.

Pleased as we were with the financial results of our enterprise, we derived far greater pleasure from the sweeter profit of considering the ways of our frugal little labourers. They awak-

ened a fresh charm in everything. "The soft murmur of the vagrant bee"—"she that speaketh"—seemed to lend increased delightfulness even to the flowers of our garden and to the wild blossoms of the woods as well. We soon grew quite knowing about the ordering of our royal favourites. They are averse to be placed where there is an echo, it distracts them while they are at work. The hives should stand in a sheltered but sunny spot; dry and hot summers only are productive of good honey harvests. The proverb says—

> "Three things require heat,
> Bees, acorns, and wheat."

During the winter we make it a practice to consign our bee stocks to a shady place, so as to prevent the bees from being lured from their hives by deceptive intervals of bright weather, when the sun is sometimes hot even on frosty days. Bees should always be examined on Twelfthtide, as it is popularly supposed that every stock of bees then found living will do well throughout the remaining winter, and those that are apparently dead will become reanimated

and continue to live and thrive. As a rule, bees rarely begin to swarm till the green or broad beans are in blossom, which is seldom before the end of May. Remember—

> "A swarm of bees in May
> Is worth a load of hay;
> A swarm of bees in June
> Is worth a silver spoon;
> A swarm of bees in July
> Isn't worth a fly."

Thunder retards the swarming of bees. They are loath to swarm in wet or windy weather. They rarely swarm *against* the wind, or when the wind is from the east. A bee farm should not be commenced with less than three stocks. When a hive is destined to stand through the winter, it ought at least to weigh twelve pounds. Bees are believed to like the frequent presence of the people to whom they belong; it inspires them with confidence while they are engaged at their work. They are not often spiteful, unless it be against violently disposed persons, for whom they exhibit the most ruthless vindictiveness. It will be seen that it was easy for us to come to the conclusion that bee-farming

ought to be regarded as a matter of more importance than it is, only, unfortunately, honey is held in less estimation in England than in any other country. In olden times a swarm of bees was accounted equal in value to the annual rental of an acre of land, and, well managed, a hive of bees would be worth as much even in the present day, as each year a swarm more than doubles its original value. With the honey we did not sell we made an abundance of sack-wine, mead, or metheglin. This, "the immortal beverage," the "nectar of the gods," was the sort of thing King Arthur so notoriously affected, and with which the Druids recompensed the services of their bards; just as in more recent days the prescribed honorarium of a poet-laureate was a butt of canary. The metheglin of the Ancient Britons must have been right worthy of the renown of the Isle of Honey—y vel ynys—as Albion was originally called. To compound this famous drink honey was employed by the hundredweight; and what gardens there must have been to have supplied sweet-briar leaves, rosemary, thyme, balm, bay, fennel, rue, and

walnut leaves by the bushel! While ginger, cloves, peppercorns, nutmegs, and other pungent spices were used by pounds in the composition of the potent mixture. Well might a vat of this mead be considered a present fit to propitiate a king. One of the chief delights following upon keeping bees is that of attending to their welfare, by cultivating those flowers most likely to furnish them with materials for honey-making. We found the very early spring and the very late autumn flowers the most useful to grow in our garden for them, as in summer-time, with the blossoming field crops and the wild herbs Nature's bountiful hand provides them with, they need no help. Buckwheat, which we grew for our fowls, is invaluable as a honey producer, on account of its flowering time being so prolonged. Mountain arabis in spring and blue borage in autumn form admirable pasturage for bees.

The most exciting part of bee-keeping is when the swarming time commences. For some days previously to quitting their waxen fortress the workers grow less industrious, and instead of

coming freighted with honey or pollen to the hives, they cease from their labours and crowd thickly about the quays of the stalls. This warns us to keep an eye upon them. Therefore, under the shade of a blooming hawthorn-tree, which lends a luscious sweetness to the bright May morning, Corisande, resting on a rustic seat, stations herself to watch the movements of the bees, until a thrill of joyousness is sent into our heart by the exclamation, "They are swarming!" The air is immediately for some distance filled with an indescribable din, caused by the tumultuous wavering of a multitude of excited bees, surging vaguely hither and thither until their queen decides upon where she will settle. The few minutes she hesitates are to us fraught with more intense anxiety than could ever be entertained at Epsom or Ascot pending the result of the race. The bees may possibly drift away without alighting near at hand, and thence be lost; or the queen may lead them to fix in the ramifications of a thorn hedge, or in a chimney top, or some such inaccessible place. She may even alter her mind and return to the

hive, or induce her subjects to cluster under the stall, and take another flight on a future day. Late swarms, owing to the greater heat of the advanced summer sun, show a strong inclination for pitching upon high places from where they cannot be dislodged. Once or twice we have lost a smart or cast through the queen choosing to fly to one of the top branches of a large oak-tree. When in this way we saw it was irretrievably lost, Corisande, who had loudly proclaimed its wonderful size while it was within reach, would under the change of circumstances philosophically console us with the assurance that it was not so very fine a swarm after all.

The next scene in the drama takes place towards evening. Assuming the bees to have landed in an accessible spot, a hive is decked inside with a bunch of bean blossoms, and then the heroine of the hour, Corisande, gauntleted, kerchiefed, and masked with a thick veil over her gipsy hat, gently sweeps the pendulous phalanx of bees into the hive which is held under to receive them. She then covers them over with a piece of canvas, turns the hive very

carefully to stand upon the ground, and late at night lifts it up and places it upon the stool where it is intended to remain. Bees seldom sting during the process of swarming; they are either too deeply absorbed in the seriousness of changing house to be resentful when they are meddled with, or from instinct they are aware that instead of unduly interfering with their arrangements we only co-operate with them for their good.

Our venture in honey-farming having turned out so well, we were induced to experiment in poultry. When I make use of the word "experiment," I do not mean that, as is usual with amateur agriculturists, we set about to convert our capital into "ducks and drakes" by speculating largely. At first, I am ashamed to say, we almost did worse, for, after the manner of most poultry-keepers, we simply provided ourselves with a given number of live stock, and left them to take their chance. Even books upon the subject of rural economy tell you that a few cocks and hens in the country will take care of themselves. Now it is certain if

you leave them to take care of themselves you cannot expect them to take care of you. Consequently, after more than a year's experience of this haphazard and improvident, though unfortunately too general, way of keeping poultry, we awoke to the conviction that the few eggs we managed to obtain could have been bought for less money than the price we had paid for our hens, to say nothing of their keep. Owing to their making clandestine nests in hedges and other out-of-the-way places, we seldom knew which of our hens were laying or where to discover their eggs, of which we never had a tithe. To shut up the fowls did not answer, as they required to be given so very much food when deprived of the opportunity of supporting themselves best part of the day; and, besides this, they showed themselves decidedly disinclined to lay at all when kept in confinement. It followed that, when entirely at liberty, most of the hens were either in a state of unprofitable broodiness without our having had tangible reasons for supposing they had been laying, or they were discovered to be busily occupied in bestowing

maternal care upon one solitary chick which would unexpectedly appear after we had lost sight of its parent for nearly a month. Necessarily much time was involved in looking about for eggs, though with Corisande it was not time lost. Frequently after her morning rambles in search of eggs she would bring in a frond of the lordly French bracken eight or nine feet high, or some rare botanical treasure, such as a bunch of red violets, or occasionally a handful of the plants of curious carnivorous sundew. Sometimes she would triumphantly display some tufts of brilliant scarlet moss, or a basket of pignuts which some country Caliban had dug for her in the grass; or, beaming with animation, she would produce roots of handsome fritillary, or bunches of beautiful blue flax blossoms, or rock roses, or a whole tribe of saxifrages. Now and then she would appear in supreme delight bearing some exquisite sparry star-shaped aerolite from the chalk formation, or one of those interesting fossils known as shepherd's crowns, or probably a mass of strange concretion called pudding-stone. "What from Wonderland?"

was our invariable question upon her return from her trips of discovery. To tell the truth, I was in intense fear lest Corisande should become scientific, but she was mercifully preserved from so dreadful a fate. Once she bounded in from her nest-hunting expedition breathless and overwhelmed with joy at having gathered a real four-leaved shamrock, which is believed to have the power of causing the realisation of every wish the heart is capable of entertaining. Alas! however, with this fatal condition—that the magical leaf is possessed unknowingly. The finder must be content with the bare pleasure of making the discovery, for, as we have said, unless held unawares, its potency avails not to the owner.

In the morning, before the hour of luncheon, to see our Corisande coming in from collecting her produce from the poultry house, with her charming Sir Thomas Lawrence-shaped basket, something like a small thrush-cage, nearly filled with new-laid eggs, which look so temptingly through the bars, I find it hard to say whether she is, in a pictorial point of view, or the con-

tents of her basket are, in a substantial sense, the more delightful to the eye.

The wife of Louis XIV., in adverting to the days of her youth, when her ideas of happiness did not soar above tending her fowls, said, "It was in the poultry yard I began to reign!" And our Corisande was confessedly the queen of our rustic realm, governing it graciously and well.

It is quite certain that when one does not take a personal interest in one's fowls they cannot possibly answer. Hirelings, unless from motives of selfishness, seldom conscientiously devote themselves to the care of any live stock that is not their own, and not always to that. A lady living near us was inspired with such emulation of Corisande's poultry that she invested in some of the most promising and precious birds she could purchase, and patiently expected the most astonishing results. At the end of nine months she told her own sad story. "You must know I have never yet had a single egg from any of my hens, and their food has cost many pounds. I leave everything to my servants, and when I

have asked why there were no eggs forthcoming, I was invariably told that it was because the hens were *broody*, whatever that may mean—some contagious and incurable disorder, perhaps. So I had my fowls made away with." Until we enlightened her, our friend was entirely unaware that a hen is in the habit of laying a score or two of eggs before being attacked with the incapacitating disease of broodiness. Following our counsels, another batch of fowls was procured, the hen-house being kept under lock and key till noon, a small hatch contrived in the door providing the birds only with the means of reaching their nests. Under this system permanent broodiness had no longer to be complained of, and an ample supply of eggs was insured. On the other side, as a reverse to this picture, we heard of a clergyman's wife who was making ten pounds per annum from a dozen hens, and of another neighbour who was disposing of eggs at eighteenpence a dozen all the year round. From these proofs of success our ardour in the cause was aroused rather than diminished by our own failure; for, as far as ourselves were

concerned, our first experiences of poultry farming were undoubtedly in every respect the reverse of encouraging; the time and trouble taken by following up our vagrant hens considerably outweighing the value of returns made us in eggs and chickens. It was suggested to us by the more enlightened of our neighbours that this state of things arose from our having only barn-door fowls, which were always given to behave in this unsatisfactory fashion, and we were strongly advised to try a better kind of stock. The game breed of fowls was recommended to our notice as possessing every virtue under heaven. They were said to be prolific layers, most successful bringers-up of large families, the mothers being unexceptionably attentive to their duties, of light weight, and on that account not destructive to lawn, pasture, or garden, delicious eating for epicures, exceedingly hardy, producing the richest-flavoured eggs, admirable at seeking their own living, tractable, lovers of their home, and not often broody. In short, according to the representations given of them, they were altogether peer-

less in every particular. Notwithstanding these tempting recommendations, we should, if we could have managed it, have rather chosen to keep the black Spanish, or the Brahma-pootras, that were originally called grey or white Shanghaes—the latter are so kindly in disposition—though frequently the hens are legitimately broody every two months during the season. As for the black Spanish, in our opinion their prestige for excellence is such that a year or two ago we elected to let our holiday excursion be taken in sunny Spain, chiefly with the motive of gratifying the wish of beholding its traditional cocks and hens in their native land. Our hopes were supremely disappointed. During more than three months' sojourn in Andalusia and the south of Spain, where the birds are supposed to spring from, we never once saw a black or "blue" fowl. The only domestic poultry we could catch sight of were of a bright buff, marked with darker shades of colour and having all the characteristics of the golden-pencilled Hamburgs in plumage, only being in body of considerably larger size. Our ex-

pectations proving fruitless, we could not have felt more crestfallen than if we had rashly set forth presuming to find the lions of Castile flourishing and in the flesh. Even near at home both Brahma-pootras and black Spanish fowls were not to be had; only the game kind were then obtainable. So we gave them a trial. We found out a pedigree brood which was for sale, paid a good price for them, and felt strong in the hope of obtaining golden returns for our investment. Alas! they proved themselves totally unworthy of their fame. They were one and all wild to a degree. On one occasion a game bird, taking fright at a strange dog, made its escape from us, and was only heard of a fortnight afterwards, when it was discovered in a wild state in a wood five miles off. As it would not be captured or decoyed by kindness, it was ultimately shot. This was almost the only fatal catastrophe that occurred amongst our fowls during the early days of our experiences. Once it happened that in broad daylight a hungry fox carried off one of our best young hens. But retribution soon overtook Master

Reynard. On the next field day he was hunted and killed, and his brush gallantly presented to Corisande to solace her for the loss of her poor bird.

But to return to our newly acquired game poultry. From being thoroughbred they scorned the cottage accommodation furnished for their comfort, and persisted in roosting in the shrubs and low trees, rather than avail themselves of anything so sophisticated as the shelter of a roof. From this it resulted that, as we could not induce them to be housed at night, the foxes carried off several of them. Their pugnacity of disposition was another serious complaint against them. They would do battle to the death; even the chickens in their little nests would *not* agree, but were seen to "fall out and chide and fight" nearly as soon as they emerged from the shell. The eggs, too, of the game hens were scarcely larger than those of bantams; the young chickens were delicate in constitution, black-legged—which rendered them unsaleable, or at least objectionable in the market for the table—and so slow in attaining maturity that they scarcely reached any size until they were seven or eight months old. There-

fore, as an article of food, they did not return the expense of growing them, unless the greatest economy were practised in rearing them. However, I must candidly confess, their eggs and their flesh were of a very fine flavour; but still, as quantity rather than quality meets with popular approbation, we were speedily convinced that the disadvantages of game fowls considerably outweighed the good qualities they were said to possess, and that they could not be kept so as, under ordinary circumstances, to bring in a sufficient profit to the farmer; inasmuch as they cannot be kept in anything like confinement, and when entirely free they are quite beyond control. They were unquestionably elegant looking, but of course merely ornamental stock of any description does not bring grist to the mill; so, after almost eighteen months' experience, we considered it desirable to embark in another kind of poultry, for we were far from being discouraged, as we were not losers even by the game breed of fowls. We commenced keeping them in the month of April, when we purchased a cock, five hens, and three broods of chickens, consisting

altogether of twenty-eight. For these we paid two guineas, or at the rate of about five shillings each for the adult birds, and sixpence each for the chickens. Some of the latter were nearly two months old and the others only a fortnight. The chickens looked fairly strong and in good health, and proved wonderfully exempt from the ailments incidental to chickenhood; but their chief enemies, foxes, hawks, magpies, &c., soon reduced their number from twenty-eight to only twenty. These we were so fortunate as to bring up, and we sold eight couples of them for five shillings a couple when they were nearly full grown towards the end of the summer. Had they been a larger or quicker growing kind of bird we should have made considerably more of them. We reserved two couples of the senior brood for pullets for early autumn laying. Between April and the middle of July, when old hens are either sitting or moulting, we obtained one hundred and eighty eggs. Fifty-five of these we devoted to the hatching of second broods of chickens, each hen having eleven eggs to sit upon. Most of the remaining eggs we disposed

of at tenpence a dozen. Forty-six chickens of our second family reached maturity. All these went to market after the beginning of December. For some of them, when chickens happened to be scarce, we received seven and sixpence a couple, notwithstanding their smallness. For others we only obtained five and sixpence a couple. The eggs we did not require for home consumption we preserved until they were sometimes only six or eight for a shilling. In consequence of our eggs not being large we did not sell them for so much as we otherwise should. In the second spring we had, in seven broods, seventy-eight chickens come into the world, and fifty of these lived and throve. We sold them at sixpence each when they were just over a month old, as we intended to change our stock. Exclusive of these fifty chickens, our nine hens produced upwards of six hundred eggs between January and towards the middle of the second summer. We sent of these to market forty-two dozens, besides reserving as many as we wanted for our own use.

The following is our debtor and creditor account of our game fowls during a year and a half:—

EXPENDITURE.

	£	s.	d.
Purchase of fowls	2	2	0
Paid for food during eighteen months .	10	5	0
	12	7	0

RECEIPTS.

	£	s.	d.
8 couple of chickens at 5*s*.	2	0	0
10 doz. eggs, 10*d*. per doz.	0	8	4
13 couple of chickens, 7*s*. 6*d*. . . .	4	17	6
10 " " 5*s*. 6*d*. . . .	2	15	0
50 chickens, 6*d*. each	1	5	0
42 doz. eggs, 10*d*. doz.	1	15	0
Cock and nine hens	2	10	0
22 doz. eggs, 1*s*. 6*d*. doz.	1	13	0
	17	3	10

Thus under unfavourable circumstances our profit was nearly five pounds. It will be seen I have not charged for labour, as I consider this was fully covered by the value of the eggs with which our table was supplied; and in addition we profited by the feathers yielded by the chickens we killed, and the compost from the fowls' roosting-place considerably enriched our garden. The fowls, having a spacious run, were almost in a state of freedom, and therefore to a

great extent provided for themselves, like the wild birds in the woods. Still we gave them an allowance of corn, with which and the kitchen waste they were kept in good order, and did well. From careful calculations we ascertained that a gallon of grain per week was enough for eight fowls. In other words, each fowl consumed a pint of corn a week. This corn cost from four to five shillings a bushel, or from sixpence to eightpence a gallon, according to the variation of market prices. Consequently we were quite satisfied the expenditure per head for the keep of poultry, *when at liberty*, should not exceed one penny a week—that is to say, when they have ample space for them to forage about in search of grubs, grass, gravel, &c. Thus we can judge that if a hen can be kept for four and fourpence per annum, she would be most profitable, though she only laid a hundred eggs in the course of the year, as, on an average, eggs may now be safely reckoned to be worth eight and fourpence a hundred, which would give in the twelvemonth a return of close upon cent. per cent. upon the outlay in food. Hens have been

known to lay three hundred eggs each in a year. Many of our black Spanish and Brahma-pootra hens lay two hundred and fifty eggs between November and August—that is, in ten months. We had once a pen of four Spanish hens which produced nine hundred and sixty eggs in the year. Generally speaking, unless one has a farmyard, and corn can be available without regard to its direct cost, it does not pay to fatten poultry. Chickens sell more readily than full-grown fattened pullets; but eggs are more sure than either to bring in a certain and speedy remuneration to the farmer. Eggs can be converted into money almost as soon as they are laid. With them there is no risk, as there is always a demand for them in the shops or market, whereas chickens are frequently victims to epidemic or accident after they have lived long enough to consume several weeks' allowance of corn; indeed, casualties are nearly always occurring to cause losses in the most promising broods of chickens. The knowledge of this induced us to turn our attention to the black Spanish fowls, whose speciality is in being

egg-producers. The hens are scarcely ever broody; and if they are, the attack only lasts a day or two, and they recommence laying immediately. They are without exception the most precocious and productive of layers. The eggs they lay are large, some of them weighing three and a half ounces each, and the hens go on laying with very short periods of intermission throughout the year, unless just while they are shedding their plumage or in extremely cold weather, though even the latter possibility may be guarded against by keeping the hens in a warm place. The young birds arrive at maturity so early that mere chickens of not more than five or six months old quite startle you by beginning to lay almost before they appear to be fully fledged; though for that matter they are rather backward in growth of feather. Hens of the black Spanish breed rarely lay less than two hundred eggs each year, and instances have been known of their laying nearly half as many again. The black Spanish have the virtue of being very domesticated, becoming most attached to their home, and not showing much

inclination to stray away even when in full liberty, yet still having an aptitude for self-support, which contributes to their profitableness. They are not so greatly given to scratching up the garden borders as are most fowls, and the flavour of their eggs is highly rich and delicious.

A cock bird—a *tom* he is called in these parts—and four hens were all we could procure to begin afresh with our poultry-farming. They were of pure breed, the tom with snowy white gills and bright red wattles and comb, he and the hens with plumage of the most glossy black. But nothing is perfect, not even Spanish fowls. They have the disadvantage of possessing dark-complexioned legs, and on this account, and also by reason of their long bony drumsticks and lankiness—for it is contrary to their nature to grow fat—there is a prejudice against them for culinary purposes unless when they are quite young chickens. From our great regard to "things of Spain" generally, and to the black Spanish poultry in particular, we resolved to spare no pains to insure the satisfactory issue of our new speculation. Rural economists do not

understand that if any sort of live stock be expected to bring in a gratifying remuneration for the capital expended upon it they must never lose sight of its interests, and they should be as solicitous about the welfare of each individual chicken as they should of an animal of larger growth. If living things are not worth caring for they are not worth keeping. In proportion to the good treatment live stock receives it not only repays its owner by means of its augmented worth, but in the eyes of strangers, from the attention bestowed upon it, it becomes invested with increased value. Indeed, almost ordinary things grow to be thought choice if they be made much of by those persons to whom they belong. Our humble neighbours, seeing the exceptional way in which we looked after everything we had, came to believe even our bees were of a better kind than other people's bees; and the very flowers in our garden, although of the most homely description, were considered to be something positively rare on account of our tending them so well. In this way our new fowls were regarded as exceedingly

precious, and did not fail to acquire for us quite a name among poultry-fanciers. Certainly our handsome Spanish family were, in their donnish aspect and stately gait, absolutely impressive. The five together formed quite a picture. When we bought them they were just a year old, in resplendent plumage, and all the four hens were laying daily. We paid fifty shillings for the pen in the month of July. Before we had them many days we had several applications for the supply of chickens; but, as this was out of the question, we waited until our hens had produced the requisite number of eggs, and these we sold at first for seven and sixpence a setting of thirteen. Later in the season we supplied them at five shillings the setting. Although it was growing rather late in the year we managed to dispose of fourteen settings of eggs (one hundred and eighty-two) between July and September—six settings at seven and sixpence, and eight at five shillings a setting. Our little speculation was now fairly afloat, and our local fame established.

Our next stroke of good fortune was a present from a friend of six pure-bred white

Brahma-pootra chickens — a young cockerel and five hen chicks. Of course we had to feed them throughout the winter before they brought us in any profit, and as they approached maturity we were obliged to keep them apart from the black Spanish stock. Owing to the process of moulting, our Spanish hens did not give us eggs very regularly during the autumn months; but from the summer when we first had them up to the succeeding Christmas we had obtained from them a total of three hundred and eighty-four eggs, bringing the average to ninety-six eggs from each hen, and giving us two hundred and two over and above those we had sold for setting. For these two hundred and two we received one pound nine and fourpence, some realising a shilling for eight, and the rest in the dead winter-time a shilling for six. By the ensuing June we had effected the sale of twenty-five additional settings of eggs — twelve at seven and sixpence and thirteen at five shillings a setting, according to the means of the purchasers, for we were not avaricious. Directly our young Brahma-pootra

hens came on and were broody we set four of them upon fifty-two Spanish eggs. From these resulted forty-four flourishing thorough-bred Spanish chickens, which we readily disposed of for stock as soon as they were four months old. Half a guinea a couple was freely given for them, they were such choice and handsome birds. From subsequent broods we reserved some chickens to add to our own stock. In the year of which I am giving the account, each of our black Spanish hens laid considerably upwards of two hundred eggs. With the exception of a few weeks in the autumn, during the moulting season, they would only stop a day or two now and then. Independently of the eggs we set and those we consumed ourselves, seven hundred and sixty-one are accounted for in the following manner:—

Sold for summer sittings	182
Eggs sent to market	202
Eggs set for chickens	52
Sold for spring sittings	325
	761

I will now present the balance sheet of our

first twelve months' experience in black Spanish poultry:—

EXPENDITURE.

	£	s.	d.
Price of 5 Spanish fowls	2	10	0
Paid for fowls' food	1	1	8
Ditto for chickens' food	2	16	0
	6	7	8

RECEIPTS.

	£	s.	d.
18 settings of eggs, 7*s.* 6*d.*	6	15	0
21 " " 5*s.*	5	5	0
44 chickens, 10*s.* 6*d.* couple	11	11	0
202 eggs	1	9	4
	25	0	4
Value of 5 fowls still in hand	2	10	0
Total	27	10	4

From the above it will be seen that a balance was left in our favour of £21 2*s.* 8*d.* But I have not charged the house for two or three score of eggs with which it was supplied by our hens; and in calculating the cost of food given to the chickens we have reckoned it at a penny a head from the day the birds were hatched, whereas a brood of a dozen chickens does not cost so much as a shilling a week at first. It may be

urged that we were exceptionally fortunate in getting such good prices for everything we sent to market. I can only say that had we been grasping we could have made even more of what we disposed of. Indeed, I am convinced it would be more difficult to prove a poultry yard to be an unprofitable speculation than it would be to show how remunerative it may be made with good management. Had we not cared to bring up young chickens or to sell settings of eggs, a dealer in the neighbourhood was willing to take at fourpence each, all the year round, every egg our black Spanish hens produced. Even in this manner we should have gained a handsome profit by our fowls; and even if we had only been paid the ordinary market price for every egg we sold, we should have been gainers by our poultry-farming, for we should have still had our pen of fowls in hand, and received between three and four pounds for eggs, while the money spent for food was not much over a pound.

Before proceeding to give an account of our Brahma-pootras, which were kept at the same time as the black Spanish fowls, the latter laying

in July, when the Brahma-pootras were only chickens, I will relate our second year's experience in our original black Spanish stock.

The young Brahma-pootra hens that we had had given us began to lay early in November, and one after another became broody towards the beginning of January. At first we entrusted them with Spanish eggs to sit upon, and they gave us the forty-two chickens I have accounted for as sold. From the next broods of black Spanish we selected twelve, two toms and ten hens. The pullets began to lay in the following July, *i.e.* the year after we had first taken to the Spanish breed. Having a good offer for the original pen of five parent birds we sold them, and in their place retained the two families of young fowls we had reared. We calculated they cost us about half-a-crown each from the time they were hatched until they commenced laying. At the expiration of a year, that is to say when July came round again, all these hens, one with another, had given us two hundred and twenty-five eggs each. Several settings were disposed of at the former price of seven shillings

and sixpence and five shillings a setting; but, as eggs were very scarce that year, if we had merely contented ourselves by selling them at market price they would have brought us in over ten pounds. For example, two thousand eggs at one shilling a dozen would be eight pounds six and eightpence, and two hundred and fifty at two shillings a dozen would be two pounds one and eightpence, amounting altogether to ten pounds eight shillings and fourpence. This result alone would have been highly satisfactory. One pen of our new birds was so much admired, that we were prevailed upon to sell three hens and the tom for exhibition; and one of our chief customers who was in the habit of taking our eggs purchased the two remaining hens for stock. Counting at the lowest rate, our returns for that year are represented thus:—

EXPENDITURE.

	£	s.	d.
Rearing twelve birds, 2*s.* 6*d.* each .	1	10	0
One year's subsequent food . . .	2	12	0
	4	2	0

RECEIPTS.

	£	s.	d.
Profit on sale of old birds	1	0	0
4 prize birds sold	2	15	0
2 „ hens „	1	10	0
12 settings of eggs, 7*s.* 6*d.* . . .	4	10	0
22 „ „ 5*s.*	5	10	0
1,808 eggs, 1*s.* doz.	7	10	8
Value of birds in hand	2	10	0
	25	5	8

	£	s.	d.
	25	5	8
	4	2	0
Balance	21	3	8

Unfortunately, when we take in hand a relation of our successes in any enterprise we embark in, we render ourselves liable to the charge of seeking to make out a case in our favour by bringing forward those facts which may redound to our credit and entirely suppressing others which would tell against us. So with the account of our poultry-farming. Unknowing persons may, perhaps, suspect it was not all gold that glittered, and that we over-estimated the profits we derived; but granting accidents occasionally happened, that there were incidental

expenses incurred, and interest of money to be allowed for, &c., and our computed gains thereby considerably reduced, yet even deducting a fair percentage to cover all these drawbacks we should have had no reason to complain. It is known that during the London season, the "upper ten thousand" pay sometimes as much as fourpence apiece for their new-laid eggs; and at Christmas time, even in the country eggs cannot be bought under twopence or frequently threepence each. Upon the face of this insufficient supply it follows it must be profitable to keep poultry if only for the production of eggs; for if a hen lays two hundred eggs in the year, and the value of these be counted at sixteen and eightpence, ten hens, after deducting the outlay for food and all other expenses, would augment one's income by over five pounds. Just now, taking the average of the market prices, eggs known to be new-laid can be safely said to be worth twelve shillings a hundred, that is to say, ten for a shilling all the year round. Hence at this rate a hen would bring in almost a pound a year to the farmer beyond the expense of her

keep, and the risk of rearing chickens be avoided, for I own, some seasons, great losses are suffered through unsuccessful broods of chickens, though this is often due to carelessness on the part of those who should use all their vigilance to look after their young stock.

Now let us turn our attention to our Brahmapootras. We had them given to us in the month of July, when they were merely chickens of eight weeks old, and we had just started in our black Spanish experiment. The Brahmapootras were of the pure white breed, feathered down to their toes, yellow-legged, beautiful to look at, and indeed having every point of perfection. The pen consisted of a cock bird and five hens. The latter began to lay at the commencement of November, when they were only just over six months old. They were of course kept entirely separated from the black Spanish fowls. Before the end of June the hens had laid considerably more than five hundred eggs amongst them, and had likewise in the meanwhile brought forth our broods of black Spanish

chickens. We borrowed a barn-door hen in a state of broodiness to sit upon Brahma-pootra eggs when we wished for chickens. Out of two settings twenty young Brahma-pootra chickens lived to become full grown, and when disposed of at the end of the year they fetched half-a-guinea each. In the course of the remaining season our Brahma-pootra hens were again inclined to sit, but we would not further their family views, as we preferred to have eggs rather than chickens. By the time they had been laying a twelvemonth, they had between them presented us with upwards of eight hundred eggs, exclusive of those we had devoted to our hatchings of chicks.

The year's account of our Brahma-pootras is as follows:—

EXPENDITURE.

	£	s.	d.
Rearing 20 birds for sale . . .	2	10	0
Rearing our own young stock . .	0	15	0
Subsequent food for ditto . . .	1	10	6
	4	15	6

RECEIPTS.

	£	s.	d.
20 young birds at 10*s.* 6*d.*	10	10	0
10 settings of eggs 7*s.* 6*d.*	3	15	0
12 „ „ 5*s.*	3	0	0
514 eggs sent to market	2	2	10
	19	7	10
Value of fowls in hand	3	0	0
	22	7	10

	£	s.	d.
	22	7	10
	4	15	6
Balance	17	12	4

Owing to the fact of our having had our Brahma-pootras given to us, I have only credited them at three pounds; but in their second year, when we had others coming on to take their place, we were offered, and accepted, five guineas for the pen of six birds. It must be remembered that we embarked in our Brahma-pootra and our black Spanish fowls simultaneously, only that the Spanish were laying while the Brahma-pootras were but chickens, and did not begin to lay until nearly six months after

the others; therefore only half of the balance proceeding from them should be added to the year's profits of their contemporaries. This would give the following amount of profit for the twelvemonth:—

	£	s.	d.
Six months' receipts from Brahmas .	8	16	2
Twelve " " Spanish .	21	2	8
Total	29	18	10

From the foregoing sums we allowed the most liberal margin for labour, interest of capital, appliances, and for every possible accident; yet we found our poultry-farming a most lucrative pursuit. After the first year, when we extended our operations, it was productive of a sure addition of forty pounds per annum to our income, and this, too, with very little trouble. Gratifying as our poultry was in a pecuniary point of view, the intense enjoyment the care of our stock afforded us more than equalled the satisfaction derived from the substantial results arising from it. The entire time bestowed upon our poultry fell far short of two hours a day, even when we had broods of young chickens to tend; so the

expense of labour would not have amounted to much had it been charged for. After our first successful experience we developed our farming enterprise by trying other kinds of fowls, such as Dorkings, Houdans, speckled Hambros, &c. You shall have the result of our observations; but first let me speak of the Brahma-pootras. In every respect they stand next to the black Spanish breed for rapid growth and early capacity for laying eggs. The principal thing against them is that they are rather addicted to broodiness, and this of course interrupts their laying. They are highly attractive-looking, hardy, and far less subject to disease than any other kind of fowl. As young chickens especially their healthiness is conspicuous by the greater number of young birds that arrive at maturity than chickens of other breeds. The hens are excellent mothers, and in mild seasons begin to sit soon after Christmas, which is a great advantage when early chickens are desirable. The Brahma-pootra toms, in the character of spouse or sire, are irreproachable. They are of pacific nature among themselves. The pullets show

such precocity in laying, that instances have been known, and quoted in the *Field* and other agricultural papers, of young Brahma-pootra hens being mothers of chickens before they were six months old. Pullets lay about sixty or eighty eggs, grow broody, hatch chickens, and begin to lay again while their little ones are still in the nest with them. Pullets frequently commence laying at five months old, and instances are related of their laying at *twenty* weeks old! One of our early birds produced one hundred and eighty eggs without a day's intermission. Another which began to lay on the first of December went on giving an egg a day for two months, and after a week's interval went on laying daily for three months more until she grew broody. Well-fed pullets of five months frequently weigh as much as five pounds, and young cockerels sometimes reach as much as seven pounds in weight. Their flesh is beautifully white and rich in flavour, tender, of course, in consequence of their growing so rapidly and becoming fat so quickly. On this account they would be invaluable as an article

of food, only that there is a prejudice against them in the market because of their having feathered legs. The spring-born Brahma-pootra pullets are most useful to supply eggs in the summer and autumn months, when the parent birds are shedding their plumage. As a rule, Brahmas are backward in developing their feathers. Thoroughbred birds do not roost but sit on the ground, therefore straw should be spread for them, and over the straw sheep hurdles placed for the fowls to perch upon the bars. The Brahma-pootras will be found to be less destructive in the garden than are ordinary fowls. They bear confinement and do well in a limited space. Though unquestionably next to the Spanish, they are the most prolific egg-producers, yet their eggs are not large, weighing usually not more than two ounces and three-quarters each; but as flesh-growers they stand unrivalled. The one chief disadvantage attached to them is that, owing to their having the domestic virtue of love of home, they are less inclined to seek their own living than the wilder species of poultry; and of course the more fowls

avail themselves of the liberty afforded them the more self-supporting they become, and the less amount of hand-feeding is required by them. Where an extensive range is impossible, and fowls need to be kept in restricted accommodation, none do so well as Brahma-pootras; with sufficient food and fresh water they thrive even in a small courtyard.

The good qualities of the black Spanish fowls I have already described. I may add that we had once a pen of five young hens which collectively gave us one hundred and twenty-five eggs in the month of December.

It is scarcely necessary to say we never ventured to keep those obsolete things, Cochin China fowls—ungainly bodies, great gluttony, small eggs, and unearthly voices are their only characteristics. Our opinion of Dorking fowls is not so high as that generally entertained of them. Unlike the Brahma-pootras, they cannot profitably be kept in anything like confinement, as they are beyond all other fowls given to vagrant habits, though this contributes in a great measure to render them more independent of

hand feeding than if they always remained near home. They are indefatigable turners-up of the soil, and hence not desirable occupants of a garden. Without doubt they are delicate to rear; very subject to disease; bad, late, and uncertain sitters; irregular layers; and the hens, when they become mothers, sometimes continue with their chickens until the latter are almost adults themselves. This of course entails much loss of time for laying. However, with all their faults, they are admirable as food, and therefore we usually get some settings of their eggs to have hatched and reared expressly for the table. If they are out early enough to sell when the asparagus first comes into season they realise a high price; occasionally we have received nine shillings a couple for them at the beginning of spring. It is currently believed that Dorking fowls will only thrive in a south-west aspect and on a chalk soil, but we have kept them in houses opening to the north, and in localities where there is no chalk, yet they have prospered equally well under these conditions; in fact, the chickens appeared less

liable to roup than when reared upon a chalk soil. The Dorking fowls form a capital cross with the Brahma-pootras. A white Dorking tom and Brahma-pootra pullet produce a splendid breed for table purposes, the size of the birds, the flavour and quality of their flesh, being positively perfect in the opinion of epicures.

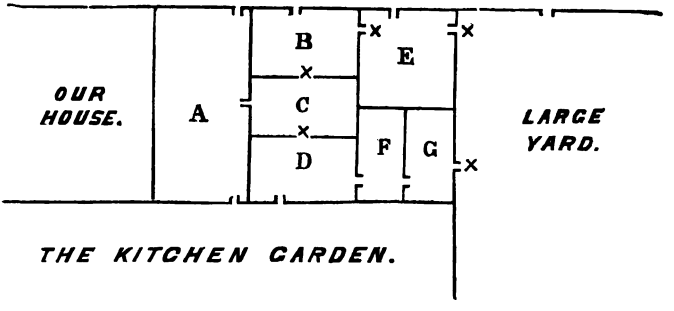
The Hamburgs are by nature rather wild; with rival birds they are pugnacious to a degree. The birds are very small, and lay eggs not much larger than those of bantams. It is said they are excellent as almost continuous layers, producing on an average two hundred and fifty eggs each hen yearly; but after a trial we did not think it advisable to retain them among our permanent stock, as we could not depend upon their giving us eggs so regularly as the black Spanish and Brahma-pootras.

The Houdans we think well of; their eggs are larger than even those of the black Spanish fowls; but they lay very intermittently, and the chickens are exceedingly difficult to rear. When young they grow very slowly, and are

more backward in development of plumage than even the Brahma-pootras; they are likewise much longer in arriving at maturity; but, like the black Spanish, they are very rarely liable to broodiness. Their flesh is remarkably fine for the table, but in consequence of the chickens being delicate in constitution, and more difficult to bring up than other kinds, we confine ourselves as much as possible to speculating only in their eggs, and in this way they pay abundantly.

The buildings of our poultry farm are of the most simple kind and yet embody every convenience. They were ready to our hand when we took possession of our little property. We had only to fit them up with perches and nesting places. The entire establishment consists of three distinct apartments: 1st, a building formerly used as a two-stalled stable; 2nd, a former cow-house; and 3rd, a *ci-devant* wood-shed. These all communicate each with its inner court, and are also accessible from the meadow, the garden, and the general yard, which is fifty-four feet square in measurement. Each establish-

ment can be shut up, and the several sorts of fowls be kept perfectly separate from their neighbours; or at choice all the divisions may be thrown open into one. The subjoined plan will give an idea of our premises, and of the accommodation enjoyed by our poultry.



A. The former stable . . .	24 feet by	12
B, C, D. Inner courts, each . .	12 „	8
E. Former cowhouse . . .	12 „	12
F, G. Wood-shed, each half . .	12 „	6

The small crosses indicate openings which are merely sliding hatches large enough to admit of ingress and egress to the fowls. The wood-shed we had partitioned in the middle so as to have an inner isolated place which we

specially devote to setting hens. We keep this carefully shut up except at feeding times. We could have devised nothing more compact than these buildings; they enable us to have full command over the liberty of our fowls, without restricting their freedom beyond certain limits. We also have the advantage of keeping the different breeds entirely apart, and yet all can gain access to the open air. The former stable is assigned to our black Spanish fowls; the old cowhouse to our Brahma-pootras; and the outer half of the wood-shed (F) to our Houdans or broods of Dorkings. Immediately a hen is broody, if we resolve to let her sit, we make up her nest in G, where she is not disturbed in the process of hatching her eggs; and when her chickens come into life they are not liable to be ill treated by the other birds. From taking pains to secure the safety of our chickens, our success in rearing them is really astonishing. Directly they are old enough to be put out of doors, we place them and their mother under a hen-coop, or rip, as it is locally termed. This we surround with a small pen made by fastening

together by their four corners four ordinary wattled sheep-hurdles; across the top of this enclosure we arrange two or three lengths of common wire netting, threepence halfpenny a yard, so that the chickens have plenty of light combined with shelter, and are effectually protected from cats, dogs, hawks, magpies, and other enemies. We only allow them to be in this open air enjoyment when the weather is fine, and even then only from ten to four each day. Frequently we shift the pen to a fresh spot to enable the occupants to have a new field for their endless researches after refreshment and recreation. In extremely hot weather we partly cover the wire top with some old sacking so as to furnish shade for the little chicks. Another reason why our poultry do so well is that we always see that they have an unfailing supply of fresh water. While other people's chickens die off in scores from "gapes," ours live and flourish principally through the virtues of the "sovereign specific." Besides the want of fresh water, another cause of mortality amongst chickens proceeds from their being permitted prematurely to range about

freely with their mothers, and by this means they are literally run off their legs. At the end of a long day's rambling the poor little creatures may be picked up in all directions dead from over-fatigue. This proves the value of our pen system. We are also most particular in insisting that our chickens are never put out too early in the day, and that they are taken indoors before sunset, so as to avoid their getting chilled, for warmth is absolutely essential to them, and the more their day's exertions are abridged, and their period of rest augmented, the better it is for them. To many of our friends these details may appear superfluous, but with chickens as with children, we only consult our own interests by attending studiously to their welfare, and it chiefly rests with ourselves whether they prosper and live, or perish miserably.

We have now farmed poultry with delight and profit for many years, but if we had not done our very best to call forth the blessing promised to the diligent we should have deserved, and undoubtedly been punished by, failure. An hospi-

table old adage tells us that we should endeavour to "perch where we peck," and we make our fowls fulfil the proverb in the way of only pecking where they perch; in other words, we make a practice of giving them their food in their respective roosting-places, so as to engage them to grow attached to their lodgings, and insure their laying in their appointed abodes. Owing to this desirable arrangement our fowls show no disposition to stray away to distant parts in search of pleasure or nourishment, beyond the precincts of their fixed run, or to make what are called stolen nests in distant hedges. Instead of being shy, they are so tame that they freely allow us to handle them, so that when any are wanted to be caught we can at any time take them up without causing a general commotion in the hen-house. From our efforts to inspire confidence rather than fear it follows that our fowls, in place of being scared when we appear among them, have instinct enough to discern in our presence a pledge of safety instead of an indication of danger. We are not content with simply giving our fowls their stated meals, but we go further

—we take thought of their amusement. Even dumb animals require recreation for their spirits as well as nourishment for their bodies. Why should we keep a number of living creatures in a state of partial imprisonment and never make any attempt to minister to their diversion, especially at those times when the weather prevents them from going abroad in search of distraction? Nothing can be more truly miserable than a flock of unfortunate fowls huddled together in their yard or shed, and visibly suffering from ennui, upon wet, windy, or wintry days, some standing upon one leg, in a vain attempt to keep the other leg warm, some with head under wing, some yawning disconsolately, some restlessly peaking in desert corners, some too rigid to move, some angry and showing fight, some looking cowed or sneaky, all seeming either sulky or exasperated, all with their plumage tightened close to their skins, and their bodies shrunk into such littleness that they appear nothing but necks and legs, and all giving most evident signs of moral and physical depression of the lowest order. To lighten the tedium on

such occasions our garden is an unfailing resource; not that we magnanimously give it over to be devastated by our poultry, but as there are always at all seasons plants of some kind we can easily spare, either cabbages, lettuces, broccoli, spinach, or in short any kind of growing vegetable, these we pull up by the roots, and throw them into our poultry courts. The fowls are straightway withdrawn from the misery of inactivity, and, as by magic, instantly made merry.

Like ourselves, fowls are charmed with variety of food, and it is well to accustom them to different sorts of grain, as, if fed exclusively for a long period upon one kind of food, fowls are apt to tire of it, and yet at first show distrust for anything strange. A frequent change stimulates their appetite and prevents waste. We have known fowls persistently refuse to eat wheat, barley, or oats, in consequence of their having been trained from youth to look upon maize, beans, and peas as their orthodox food. Without question, buck, or beechwheat (commonly called branks), is the most nutritious kind of

corn we know, and poultry show a great liking for it. In England it is almost exclusively grown in game preserves as food for pheasants; but great quantities of it are imported from abroad, and it is easily procured from the corn-factor. We devote a considerable space of ground in our garden to the cultivation of buck-wheat, as its flowers are so valuable in supplying our bees with honey, and it blooms succession-ally through many months. The borage plant, too, is as rich in seed for the poultry as it is in blossoms for the bees. Anything in the shape of small grain being so expensive to purchase for the young chickens, we every year make a point of growing a good-sized patch each of canary-seed, mustard-seed, cress, and Italian millet of both sorts, the upright and the branched. Immediately any of these ripen we pull them up by the stalks, tie the plants in small sheaves, and hang these up in a barn to dry. When wanted, we do not trouble to thresh out the seed, but give a sheaf to the chickens, who take intense pleasure in the performance of scratching out the grain. Any sort of spare

garden seed is greedily devoured by our fowls, so that what would otherwise be wasted is turned to good account. Bean or pea haulm, and even spent flower plants which have run to seed, furnish our fowls with variety and entertainment. Chopped onion leaves are looked upon as essential to the health of quite young chickens, while for adult birds, during the painful and exhausting process of moulting, hempseed and linseed should be allowed them to keep them in strength, and enable them to throw out new plumage with more facility. Unless it is intended to fatten fowls for the table, we find that soft food, such as moistened meal, is very wasteful, as the birds make a deal of contention over it while it is being eaten, and are given to run hither and thither with portions of it, and end by scattering it about the ground. Swelled rice, groats, crushed raw potatoes, lentils, which are sometimes to be had cheap, tares, rape-seed, in short, any pulse or grain, may be offered to fowls, except raisin pips, which are believed to hinder hens from laying. Bread-crusts, beer-bottoms, wine-lees, damaged fruit, refuse from

the honey harvest, cold vegetables from the kitchen—nothing need be wasted where there are fowls. In the winter months we usually swell our grain by placing it over night in a large stone jar filled up with water, and kept upon the hot stove or in the oven till morning.

To answer the vexed question whether poultry-keeping is compatible with the well-being of a garden we confidently answer, Yes! Only we admit that to ensure the safety of the growing crops the fowls must have the advantage of possessing a grass run, otherwise the green vegetables will suffer; though, in fact, fowls will not touch even these while there are slugs, snails, and other pests first to be disposed of. Fowls consume, and consequently require, such a quantity of green food, that about a couple of score of birds will, if in unrestrained liberty, pretty well keep down the growth of half an acre of pasture. This shows the necessity of well supplying them with green vegetables when they are so unfortunate as to be kept in confinement, and be exclusively hand-fed.

On account of fowls being naturally gregarious, they certainly do better when they are in tolerably large numbers. In the cold season they lay better and are altogether more thriving, owing to the temperature of their houses being raised by the heat of their bodies; but of course overcrowding should be avoided, and the greatest cleanliness in their roosting-places is essential to their well-being. If it can possibly be contrived, the floors under their perching-places should permit of the poultry houses being washed, or at least swept, and strewn over with fresh sand or wood ashes daily. We have remarked that the Brahma-pootras do not roost; they therefore need a bed of straw or hay on the ground. The perches for the other kinds of fowls should not be put too high, or the birds are apt to injure themselves in getting down from them. Light, sun, fresh air, and plenty of clean water are the chief things indispensable to ensure the welfare of poultry. We find ordinary glazed milk-pans the best utensils to give the water in. Some people recommend earthenware saucers, like those used with flower-pots,

but these are so porous that the water soon percolates through them, and they are likely to contract green mould, by which the water becomes tainted and unwholesome. In the middle of our milk-pans we arrange some chalk in large lumps, by which the water is not only improved, but landing-places are formed in it to prevent the chance of the chickens being drowned in case they should get immersed.

We have spoken of preserving our eggs when requiring to keep them for any length of time. The process is simply to take them directly they are brought from the nests and smear them over with a small piece of cotton wool moistened with fresh olive oil. Eggs thus treated are rendered unfit for setting, but will be found to keep good for some months.

It is a mistake to believe fowls cannot be too well fed to promote the production of eggs. If the hens grow too fat they either cease laying altogether or only lay unfertile eggs. The hens are likewise rendered liable to apoplexy.

Persons who have applied themselves to studying the habits of fowls soon become aware

that attending to their general comfort—that is, looking after them properly—is of much more consequence than merely feeding them. This is the reason why French hen-wives are so prosperous in their poultry-farming; they grudge no time to see to the well-being of their stock, and in the end it fully repays them for the care they have taken of it.

Notwithstanding our great zeal in the cause of poultry, we have personally never been so ambitious as to seek distinction by exhibiting our stock. We know that entering the lists for prize-taking is a very costly, hazardous, and frequently disappointing speculation. Therefore, unless one has a superabundance of time and capital at command, or one has allowed one's *fancy* for poultry to exuberate into a *folly*, it is safer, like ourselves, to be satisfied with moderate gains, and the golden opinions of those who know us, than incur loss by striving to obtain public recognition of the merits of our stock. The expense of getting up fowls for show is really something incredible. Several head of poultry are, or ought to be, grown and

fed highly for the purpose, before a selection of promising birds can be chosen as fit to enter the list for champion birds. Brahma-pootra and Dorking toms should be made to attain twelve pounds, and the hens nine or ten pounds each in weight, and perhaps, after all the outlay and pains expended, they may not succeed in getting so much as honourable mention from the judges.

Under ordinary circumstances, chickens unfattened—what are termed runners—when fit to kill, should not cost the poultry farmer more to rear than two shillings each when about five months old. These sold at seven shillings a couple would secure a profit of three shillings, and prove amply remunerative to the grower; though the sale of eggs pays better, and no loss of time involved.

From a very long experience we can confidently assert that if a hen is worth having she ought to represent a clear profit of one pound a year. Consequently, ten or twenty hens of the right sort would be equivalent to an additional ten or twenty pounds per annum to one's in-

come. With such results of domestic industry to look forward to, who would not gladly follow the example we have set them? We have incontestibly proved that the *utile* and the *dulce* are perfectly compatible. Not only in a crude sense have we made things pay, but the pleasure proceeding from our manner of life has far transcended the satisfaction derived from considerations of mere pounds, shillings, and pence. We have earned pleasure as well as profit. Prosperity has been courted, and prosperity has crowned our endeavours. Everything has thriven and still thrives with us.

More than twenty bright years have elapsed since we came to our rural nest, but our halcyon days are not yet ended. Saplings, which we planted with our own hands, have grown into goodly trees, under which our chickens find shade in summer and shelter in winter, while seedling sycamores set by ourselves already offer a honied banquet to our busy bees. Year after year our land unfailingly brings forth its increase; in fact, we look upon our humble country seat as a little treasury. But apart

from the pecuniary reward offered us, what is so priceless as *success?* And not only have we achieved success, we feel we have done more—"we have deserved it."

THE END.

PRINTED BY VIRTUE AND CO., LIMITED, CITY ROAD, LONDON.